



## **Crime Scenes as Augmented Reality**

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Sandvik, Kjetil

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Kjetil Sandvik

***Crime scenes as augmented reality. Models for enhancing places emotionally by means of narratives, fictions and virtual reality.***

*Abstract*

Using the concept of augmented reality, this article will investigate how places in various ways have become augmented by means of different mediatization strategies. Augmentation of reality implies an enhancement of the places' emotional character: a certain mood, atmosphere or narrative surplus of meaning has been implemented. This may take place at different levels, which will be presented and investigated in this article and exemplified by some cases from the fields of tourism and computer games.

The article suggests that we may use the forensic term *crime scene* in order to understand the concept of *augmented reality*. The crime scene is an encoded place due to certain actions and events which have taken place and which have left various traces which in turn may be read and interpreted: blood, nails, hair are all (DNA) codes to be cracked as are traces of gun powder, shot holes, physical damage: they are all readable and interpretable signs. As augmented reality the crime scene carries a narrative which at first is hidden and must be revealed. Due to the process of investigation and the detective's ability to reason and deduce, the crime scene as place is reconstructed as virtual space which may be (re-)told as part of solving the crime, that is (re-)telling the course of events and thus revealing the murder mystery and finding the murderer.

*Introduction: revisiting Meyrowitz*

Ever since Meyrowitz wrote *No Sense of Place* (1985), his ideas about how (at that time) new media influence our perception of time and place have been widely debated within media research. This article would like initially to agree with the points being put forward by Meyrowitz, that "the evolution in media [...] has changed the logic of the social order by restructuring the relationships between physical place and social

place and by altering the ways in which we transmit and receive social information” (op.cit.: 308), but at the same time to point out that today’s new media is not just (re)shaping our sense of place but actually producing new types of places and new types of spatial experiences. The new media – and first and foremost digital media – have given us a variety of media generated and mediated environments (various 3D-worlds from *World of Warcraft* to *Second Life*) as arenas for a wide range of social, political and economical activities. But as media research in the 1990’ies tended to regard these activities and their mediatic environment as of another order than the ‘real world’ – as a exotic *cyberspace* – the media evolution in the new millennium has made it increasingly clear that the borders between online and offline places and activities are blurred and dissolved and that physical and mediatized places are becoming intertwined (cf. Bolter, Fetveit, Jensen, Manovich & Stald 2007: 149ff.).

I would like to argue that – in the same way as with the relation between online and off-line worlds – the lines between physical, mediated and mediatized places are blurred, that they are all part of the same continuum and that when it comes to our perception all types of places are mediated and mediatized. Following this line of thinking we might claim that we do not just experience e.g. Katmandu in itself, we do so as tourists who have created an image of the Nepalese capitol from *Lonely Planet*, travel programs, romantic notions of Eastern culture and spirituality, and from the tales told by other tourists and thus we are part of a “mutual process of structural *site sacralization* and corresponding *ritual attitudes* among tourists” (Jansson 2006: 28). The actual place is thus transformed into a *touristic space*, which is a space that is “both socio-material, symbolic and imaginative” (op.cit.: 28-29). Following this line of argument, the experience of places will always be connected to various forms of mediatization which define and frame the way we experience and how we define ourselves and the roles we play in connection to this experience. As Jansson points out, tourists will “engage in the representational realms of marketing, popular culture, literature, photography and other sources of socio-spatial information” and use this mediation not only to develop “a referential framework for the planning of a trip, but also a *script* for how to *perform* and perhaps reconfigure their own identities within the desired setting” (op.cit.: 13-14).

I will like to propose that these and other forms of mediatization of places which are both connected to mediation of the actual place on the one hand and to the mediatization of our experience of this place on the other can be seen as a process of

*augmentation*; an emotional enhancement of our sense and experience of place by means of mediatization. As such my understanding of augmented places is in the line of how authentic places are being perceived in this anthology (as displayed in the introductory chapter) as a result of various (technologically, artistically, and economically) mediatization processes through which places are produced, transformed and appropriated.

### *Strategies for augmented places: the crime scene as model*

To elaborate on this process of augmentation I will use the forensic term *crime scene* as a model for understanding augmentation of places<sup>1</sup>. Crime scenes are constituted by a combination of a plot and a place. The crime scene is a place which has been in a certain state of transformation at a certain moment in time, the moment at which the place constituted the scene for some kind of criminal activity. As such the place has been encoded in the way that the certain actions and events which have taken place have left a variety of marks and traces which may be read and interpreted. Traces of blood, nails, hair constitutes (DNA)codes which can be decrypted and deciphered, in the same way as traces of gun powder, bullet holes, physical damage are signs to be read and interpreted. Thus the place carries a plot (a narrative) which at first is hidden and scattered and has to be revealed and pieced together through a process of investigation and exploration with the aid of different forensic methods, eyewitnesses and so on; - through reading and interpretation. During her investigation the detective's ability to make logical reasoning and deductive thinking as well as to make use of her imagination is crucial to how the crime scene is first deconstructed and then reconstructed as a setting for the story (that is the actions of crime). By decoding this reconstructed place the story itself is also reconstructed: the crime is being solved, the murderer revealed.

Using the crime scene as a model for understanding augmented places then implies that we are talking about a place which has acquired a certain surplus of meaning, a certain kind of narrative embedded into it.

Augmentation of actual places – that is the process in which a place is transformed into a 'crime scene' – implies that the characteristics of these places have been enhanced in that a certain mode, atmosphere or story has been added to them as extra layers of meaning. This may happen in at least five different ways.

### Narrativization

Augmentation may take place as a process of *narrativization* in which the place constitutes a scene for the performance of 'true' stories. This is the case when London's Eastend is functioning as a setting for *Jack The Ripper Tours* which allow tourists to partake in guided city walks following the blood drenched trail laid out in the actual streets of late 1800 London by the first known serial killer in history. As a result of the guide's narration and the navigation through these streets and along historic buildings like Tower of London, the modern highly illuminated city gives way for an image of dim gas lights and dark alleys where defenseless prostitutes were easy targets for Jack's razor-sharp scalpel.

But this type of augmentation may also happen in a process where an actual place constitutes a setting for new stories. This is what happens with the global art project *Yellow Arrow*. Here you are invited to put up small yellow stickers at different locations in an actual city and then upload a personal story with connection to the chosen location. The arrow-sticker is provided with a certain sms-number so that others who come across your yellow arrow can use their mobile phones to read the story, with which you have chosen to augment this certain location.

Augmented places as places which have some narrative embedded into them may be found in different cultures and different historical periods. Native Australians (aborigines) believe that *songlines* run through the landscape telling the story of their ancestors and how the land came into being, and by following this narrative trail these stories can be retold. The mnemonic method known as *memory theatre* can be traced back to the Antiquity. Here speeches were memorized by linking the different parts of a speech to well-known and recognizable architectural features of the place in which the speech was to be given. By scanning the variety of statuary, friezes, articulated columns within the hall, the rhetorician skilled in this art (*Ars Memori*) could remember the different aspects of his speech. The augmented place then would provide the order and a frame of reference which could be used over and over again for a complex constellation of constantly changing ideas. Thus the same place could be augmented with a lot of different narratives (cf. Yates 1966).

In today's popular culture we also find augmentation of place by the means of narrativization in theme parks. Not unlike the Memory Theatre, the theme park becomes a memory place whose content must be deciphered:

The story element is infused into the physical space a guest walks or rides through. It is the physical space that does much of the work of conveying the story the designers are trying to tell. [...] Armed only with their own knowledge of the world, and those visions collected from movies and books, the audience is ripe to be dropped into your adventure. The trick is to play on those memories and expectations to heighten the thrill of venturing into your created universe. (Carson 2000)

Augmentation of place through means of narrativization thus implies an element of performativity: the place comes into being through our performance (actions, movement, navigation...). As we will see this performative element implying the active use of the recipient's body as a central part of the reception (and thus construction) of place is present in most of the augmentation strategies presented in this article.

### *Fictionalization*

Augmentation of places may also happen through *fictionalization*. Here the actual place is working as a setting for fictions as seen in Henning Mankell's use of Swedish small town Ystad as storyspace for his Wallander-books, in Gunnar Staalesen's use of the city of Bergen as a noir-setting for his tales about private eye Varg Veum, and in the way Liza Marklund constructs a Stockholmian underground as a stage for her protagonist, criminal reporter Annika Bengtzon. For the readers of Mankell, Staalesen and Marklund these actual locations which are used as crime scenes, have become augmented: Wallander's Ystad is interacting with and blended into 'real-life' Ystad and actually changing the identity of the actual small town. Tourists visiting Ystad visit at the same time a real and a fictional town and telling the two apart is quite difficult. As argued by Sandvik & Waade (2008: 8) the *concept* and the imagination of Ystad as a city and physical, geographical location, can hardly be distinguished from the crime stories and the popularity of Wallander's Ystad. Here the concept of the crime scene may be regarded as one aspect of Ystad as a location that illustrates this mediated and media specific spatial production. It is not crime scenes containing actual crime acts, but rather crime scenes in crime fiction and crime series about Inspector Wallander, that transform the city into an augmented place and an emotionalized and embodied spatial experiment. When tourists visiting Bergen attend

a *Varg Veum Tour* they are taken on a guided city walk through parts of the actual town but following the trails laid out not by some historical person or chain of historical events (like in the case of Jack the Ripper above) but by fictional characters and their actions and thus the actual places have become augmented as a result of fictionalization.

An interesting case here would be US small town Burkittsville which was used as a setting for the fictional tale told by the web-campaign and movie *The Blair Witch Project*. *The Blair Witch Project* was fiction presented as reality. The project's website told the story about three film-college students missing in the woods around Burkittsville, Maryland while exploring the myth about the witch from Blair, a town situated where Burkittsville is today and which was allegedly abandoned by its inhabitants after a series of mysterious murders and disappearings which was believed to be caused by a witch's curse. The website reconstructs the story of the city of Blair and the myth about the Blair Witch as well as containing reports on the police's investigation of the three missing students, the recovery of diaries and docu-videos (which made up the *Blair Witch Project*-movie which premiered in theatres months after the release of the website) shot by the students as they were hunting the witch (and obviously themselves being hunted). Everything here – apart from Burkittsville itself – is fiction. But this fiction enhanced the actual city of Burkittsville with an aura of mystery which the town itself afterwards has been using as part of its branding strategy<sup>ii</sup>. Even though there has never been any witch, missing students or abandoned city, tourists visiting Burkittsville can attend guided *Witch Tours* in the area where the story about the three missing students takes place (see <http://www.burkittsville.com/>).

### Demonization

The ways of augmenting places described above relates to specific places which are emotionally enhanced either by ways of narrativization or fictionalization. But augmented places may also be the result of certain *categories* of places being used as settings in books, movies, tv-series which may inflict on how we later perceive these types of places. American suburbia, small town communities, the English countryside are examples of categories of places which has been exposed to augmentation in the shape of displacement, estrangement and various strategies of *demonization*. From David Lynch' *Blue Velvet* to tv-series *Desperate Housewives* suburbia has been reconstructed not just as quiet, sleepy outskirts but as places with a dimension of

creepiness added to them, their polished surfaces hiding deranged people and activities. *Twin Peaks* reconstructed the small town community as a mysterious place where things and people are not what they seem. The English countryside is no-longer just idyllic houses, rose gardens, nice inns and so on; augmented by the tv-series *Inspector Barnaby* and its fictional Midsummer County the countryside is also a potential high crime area with murder-rates exceeding most cities, the population taken into account.

### Simulation

Broadening the scope of augmenting places by means of narrativization and fictionalization we may talk about how places may be simulated. It can be argued that touristic practices such as ‘murder walks’ in connection to either real or fictitious crime events (as described above) may be seen as simulation of places and spatial experience: the participating tourists are performing navigational operations which simulates those of the murderer (e.g. Jack the Ripper) or the investigating detective (e.g. Wallander). However, in the following I will focus on how computer games are using simulation as spatial augmentation strategy.

*Simulation* as narrative strategy is well known in crime scene investigations in the performing of reconstructions of how the actual crime may have happened. Here the investigators are playing out the roles of e.g. the potential murderers, helpers, victims, witnesses and so in an attempt to recap the chain of events in time and space.

The reason for talking about simulation here instead of representation is that when it comes to computer game narratives – or playable fictions as they more correctly should be called – these are not represented to a reader or a spectator, they are acted out by a player. The player participates in a simulation of actions and events as if they were real. And this is exactly what the crime scene reconstruction does: in the same way as the player puts herself in the role of the game character (the avatar) ‘the profiler’ puts himself in the role of the criminal (like e.g. detective Lacour in Danish TV series *Unit One*).

So, simulation of actions in time and space is what we find in computer games. Here various computer-generated graphical structures and animated objects which can be manipulated by the player allow us to explore and interact with a certain type of narrative spatiality which is constructed – or at least comes into being – by ways of our agency and our integrative and controlling operations.



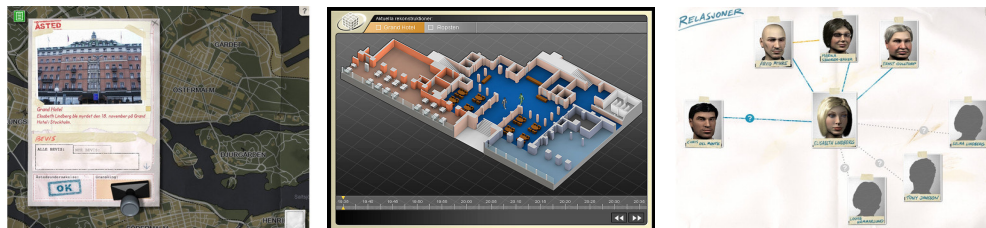
One of the basic characteristics of crime fiction is that solving the crime is more important than the crime itself. As readers or spectators we are engaged in the detective work of police officers from the homicide divisions and forensic experts of the CSI-team. The tension-building in this type of fiction is connected to how this work is done, what challenges and obstacles are encountered along the way, the time pressure and so on. This type of fiction includes an explorative investigation of the crime scene, interrogation of witnesses and suspects which all in all construct a picture of the crime and who might have done it. This plot structure in which exploration and puzzle-solving are major characteristics is found in computer games and especially in the action-adventure genre. So – when computer games remediate crime fiction we are speaking of a media which already shares some genre features with the crime novel, the crime movie or the crime tv-series, but with the important difference that in the computer game we are no longer readers or spectators but participating agents in the investigation.



The crime mystery *Dollar* has been written especially for the PC by Liza Marklund using the crime scene settings she uses in the crime series about crime reporter Annika Bengtzon. In the computer game though you do not get to play the famous reporter, but become a part of Stockholm police as the chief of investigation in a case about a millionaire heiress who has been killed at one of Stockholm's fashionable hotels. In order to fulfil this task you must comb various parts of the Swedish capital and interrogate several more or less suspicious people. By doing so, you start to reconstruct the story about the victim who was a well-known person in Swedish high society as she was to inherit a large business empire. She was a person with many enemies and who many would like to get rid of. And as is the case with any murder story by Marklund the crime is intertwined in a complex web of political and financial conspiracies, games of power and shady activities like trafficking and prostitution.

And a many of the suspects and others you encounter throughout your investigations have plenty of reasons to keep information from you.

Even though *Dollar* may be compared to an adventure game like e.g. *Myst* where the main gameplay is based on exploring the game world and solving puzzles and thereby constructing the story of the game, in this game you don't get to perform the adventurous tasks yourself. You are dependent of your CSI-assistants to perform forensic work and interrogating suspects, eyewitnesses and so on. It is your task to decide what these assistants should do and to collect and analyze the different information they provide you with and by doing so trying to piece the over all picture together by reconstructing the movements and actions of the victim and potential murderers, using different maps, reconstruction models, diagrams displaying how different people involved are connected to each others an so on. The plot laid out by Marklund is complex, labyrinthine, using a variety of different location and containing blind alleys, false scents and misleading information. Your choices are crucial to how your investigation develops and to whether you will succeed at solving the crime.



This is the core logic of the interactive and play-centric setup found in computer games: the story has to be performed by you instead of narrated or shown to you, and a vital element in this performative story is that your performance not just (re)construct the story, it also (re)construct the spatial environment it takes place within. Even though you don't get to move around to the different locations in Markslund's *Dollar*, you use your assistants to do so and you may also use the different tools mentioned above, like e.g. a computer program to model and thus reconstruct the hotel in which the murder took place. This is how you – by making choices, selecting and analyzing information, reconstructing locations and patterns of action and movement – make the crime plot as well as its setting unfold as a result of your partly spatial performance.

### Palimpsest

Finally augmentation of places may happen in the form of the *palimpsest*, that is the over-layering of an actual place with some kind of fictional universe creating a sort of *mixed reality* in which the place has a status both as an actual location in the physical world and as a story space. Here we find cultural phenomena like different kinds of role-playing games in which a physical space is being used as a setting for the game itself. But unlike the stage-set in the theatre or the film-set in movie-productions the place itself has not been constructed, altered or manipulated.

Augmentation as palimpsest implies that the actual places (the specific town quarter, the specific street, the specific café) as well as not-participating people just happening to be present at the time of the game are included as a setting for the game. Thus, to the participating players the chosen quarter, street or café is more than just a location in the physical world, it is embedded with a certain meaning (narrative, emotion etc.) and thus part of the game fiction being played out. The use of costumes and props is also part of this augmentation. This is the case with so-called ‘in-crowd’ role-playing games which typically take place in urban areas like *Vampire Live*, which is played out every once-a-month in the centre of Danish town Aarhus, using e.g. cafés as locations: “The “plot” unfolds over a period of several hours in the basement around a table tennis-board and some ordinary café tables and different role-players come and go” (Knudsen 2006: 320).

Another example of these types of augmented places which are constituted by a kind of mixed reality is so-called pervasive games in which actual places are symbiotically fused with information- and communication technology such as mobile phones containing instant messaging, camera, GPS (global positioning systems) and internet. An example of a game in which both game universe and gameplay have become ubiquitous and embedded in the player’s physical surroundings could be Electronic Arts’ adventure game *Majestic* (2001). Here the gameplay and the way in which the game story is constructed include receiving mysterious phone calls in middle of the night, getting anonymous e-mails and attending fake websites. *Majestic* was promoted as the game which ‘will take over your life’ and was aiming at producing a game experience in lines of what is experienced by Michael Douglas’ character in David Fincher’s *The Game* (1997). And even though the game actually

flopped and was taken off the market not long after its release, *Majestic* forecasted the trend within game design which today is known *pervasive gaming*.

Pervasive games derive from a trend within computer design which seeks to develop computer systems which processes are not just defined to the mediated space of the computer, its screen and interface but which are transgressing ‘the box’ and become embedded in the physical environment in the shape of intelligent rooms, intelligent kitchenware, intelligent lighting systems intelligent clothes and so on. Here physical reality and computer mediated reality become mixed and the same type of mixed reality is what we find in pervasive games which may be defined as “game spaces that seek to integrate the virtual and physical elements within a comprehensibly experienced perceptual game world” (Walther 2005: 489). In a game like Alive Mobile Game’s *Botfighters* (2001) the game design contains possibilities for using physical places as game universe offering a gameplay including a combination of tracking and site-specific interaction between players both online using advanced mobile phones with GPS and off-line battling each others in the streets. In *Botfighters*, the player “shoots” other gamers located in the same physical area with the help of mobile phones including positioning technology. A downloadable java-client also makes it possible for a radar display and graphical feedback to be shown on the mobile phone.

In these cases the mediated, virtual space is collapsed into the physical, real place (and vice versa). Because the game is pervasive, that is penetrating the physical world, and ubiquitous, that is potentially present everywhere, the fictional game world becomes a part of the player’s physical environment. At the same time the physical environment becomes part of different mediated spaces ranging from the GPS’ graphical representation of the physical environment and the player’s position in this environment to SMS and e-mails as communication channels for navigational information as well as websites containing online-dimensions of the game universe.

### *Putting the body into place – some closing remarks*

As cultural phenomena, computer games and pervasive games are related both to play and games in general and to the performative arts (like theatre) and thus computer games and pervasive games introduce a strong bodily dimension to how they are experienced. As fictions they are not being read or watched, they are played and as

such they are dependent on the player's direct and physical actions and this is how computer game fictions in many ways simulate our behaviour in 'real life'. Janet H. Murray has explained that computer game fictions more than anything else present themselves as dynamic, narrative processes which are embodied by the computer and played out as a result of the player's performative agency:

Whereas novels allow us to explore character and drama allows us to explore action, simulation narrative can allow us to explore process. Because the computer is a procedural medium, it does not just describe or observe behavioral patterns, the way printed text or moving photography does; it embodies and executes them. And as a participatory medium, it allows us to collaborate in the performance. (Murray 1997: 181)

Thus the experience of plot and place in computer games relates to the human bodily conception of being situated in our surroundings, what Torben Grodal labels our "first-person experiences" (Grodal 2003: 42). Here movement in three dimensions is what constitutes our reception of the world and thus also our conceptualization of the world in which even non-physical events and phenomena are being conceptualized by the use of spatial metaphors (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980). It follows that the way a computer game engages not only the player's cognitive apparatus but also her body is vital as to how plot and place in computer game fictions are experienced:

Computer games and some types of *virtual reality* are the most perfect media for total simulation of our basic first-person story experiences, because these media allow a full PECMA [perception, emotion, cognition, motor action]-flow by connecting perceptions, reasoning and emotions. Motor and pre-motor cortex and feedback from our muscles focus our audiovisual attention and enhances the experience with a 'muscular' reality which produces 'immersion' in the player. (op.cit.: 38)

Engagement of the player's body takes place on several levels in computer games, ranging from the virtual physicality inherent in the player's *immersion* in the game universe and her presence by substitute (*telepresence*) which is found in the player's control over the game character and game story to the tactility in encountering and operating the games interface. This emphasis on the body is also articulated in various

forms of transgressions of the computer mediated world into the physical place which can be seen in how many computer games have surround sound which expands the fictional universe compared to what is shown on the computer screen, together with new types of interfaces which with the use of cameras and other sensor technology includes the player's body as a navigational tool. Similar transgression may be found in so-called 'out-of-the-box' games (pervasive games) as described earlier in which the game universe not only appears as computer made and mediated but also as embedded in the physical environment, in which the player's body becomes a part of this game universe. Thus playing a game becomes a performance constituted by role-play and choreography.

As such computer games (in line with the other categories of augmented places presented in this article) may be regarded not just as a spatial turn in today's media studies (cf. Falkenheimer & Jansson 2006, p.15ff.) but also as part of a certain *performative turn* (see Jones 1998) in our culture as such which – in opposition to the *linguistic turn* (cf. Rorty 1967) which regards the world as text and the *visual turn* (cf. Mitchell 1994) which regards the world as picture – regards the world as a stage for our actions and bodily investments (cf. Knudsen 2006). Computer games therefore become a certain way of representing – or rather simulating – the world which may be described as a *performative realism* (ibid.) which also may be found in the spatial practices of augmentation through narrativization, fictionalization, demonization, simulation, and over-layering described in this article, and in which there are no recipients in the traditional sense, only participants whose bodies have been inscribed in the action and events in time and in space.

So, in regards to Meyrowitz, what is at stake here is not so much that mediated places are changing our sense of place or making our sense of place collapse all together, but that mediatized places, that is places which are augmented by uses of media, provide new spatial experiences. We understand places through media (e.g. *Lonely Planet*, *Google Earth*, travel literature and so on), we use media to construct places (using cameras, mobile phones, GPS, maneuvering through 3D-structures by means of an interface and some kind of avatar in a computer game, and so on), and media shapes our experience of places through different augmentation strategies as explained in this article.

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<sup>i</sup> This line of thought has earlier been unfolded in collaboration with Anne Marit Waade (cf. Sandvik & Waade 2008)

<sup>ii</sup> It may be argued that place branding should represent yet another strategy of augmenting places somewhere between narrativization and fictionalization, but to me there is more to place branding than just augmenting. Place branding is about changing the very characteristics and story of an actual place. As pointed out by André Jansson in his paper “Filling the Void: Urban Renewal, the Transitional Gaze, and the Discourse of Fatefulness” (p.2) at the NordMedia 07 Conference (Helsinki August 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> 2007) place branding “must be understood as more general, abstract processes of mediation through which spatial phantasmagoria are channelled” and is due to “an interplay between emotional-representational dimensions”: on the one hand (with reference to Goffman) “an experience of standing at a crossroad with significance for one’s life biography” and on the other hand “a mode of spatial interpretation, creation and appropriation, through which the transitional potential of a certain place is accentuated” and which is “tied to the tropes of futurity and progress, articulating what a space *might become*”.